Central Intelligence Agency
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

29 JUL 1987

NOTE TO: Director of Central Intelligence

The attached addresses the United Press International supposition that CIA has begun a dispute with DoD over space-based lasers. In short, we have not. The UPI article makes the incorrect assumption that the position as published in Soviet Military Power is the official DIA view. It is not.

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Richard J. Kerr
Deputy Director for Intelligence

29 JUL 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Richard J. Kerr
Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT: UPI Story on CIA/DoD Dispute Over Soviet Lasers

1. Action: No action. This memorandum is in response to your query on the validity of the UPI article. In short, the article is incorrect, and probably was precipitated by a DoD blunder in Soviet Military Power.

2. The UPI Allegation - The article states that "the CIA has backed away from a previous estimate of the Soviet Union's space laser weapons development, triggering a dispute with the Pentagon, U.S. officials say." It goes on to say that the DIA "has projected the Soviets could have a prototype weapon in space before 1990 for killing surveillance and communication satellites. Its position was reflected in the latest annual edition of Soviet Military Power issued by the Pentagon in March. Until recently, the CIA shared this estimate" (emphasis added).

3. There is very little disagreement in the Intelligence Community on this issue. In the recently approved National Estimate, NIE 11-3/8, all members of the Intelligence Community agreed that the Soviets:

-- Could begin deployment of such a system after 2000, perhaps about 2005;

-- Could have a prototype with military capability by the mid to late-1990s.

There is, however, slight disagreement over when the Soviets might conduct a feasibility demonstration (not a system demonstration). All but CIA say this will probably occur in the early 1990s, possibly as soon as 1990. CIA, in a footnote, says it believes the feasibility demonstration would not occur until the mid-1990s.

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SUBJECT: UPI Story on CIA/DoD Dispute Over Soviet Lasers

4. How does this compare with previous positions? In last year's Estimate, both CIA and DIA stated that there was a moderate probability that the Soviets would test a prototype in the early 1990s. So this year, both DIA and CIA slipped a little (to the mid to late 1990s). Last year's Estimate did not address feasibility demonstration dates.

5. Note that the UPI article says the DIA view is for a prototype weapon in space before 1990, and that this is far from DIA's actual position, as reflected in this year's Estimate.

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Richard J. Kerr

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Office of Current Production and Analytic Support
CIA Operations Center

News Bulletin

Current listing of: T1488:3
SLUG: pm-sovlaser sked 7-27 0771
SERVICE: UPInarw

07/27/87 00:21 Page: 1
DATE: 07/27/87 00:13:34
STORY: 0064

OPERATIONS CENTER PRESS

CIA disputes defense intelligence on Soviet laser By WALTER ANDREWS

WASHINGTON (UPI) _ The CIA has backed away from a previous estimate of the Soviet Union's space laser weapons development, triggering a dispute with the Pentagon, U.S. officials say.

The Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency has projected the Soviets could have a prototype weapon in space before 1990 for killing surveillance and communication satellites. Its position was reflected in the latest annual edition of Soviet Military Power issued by the Pentagon in March.

Until recently, the CIA shared this estimate.

But the spy agency has changed its position, U.S. government officials said last week, because laser scientists now believe the technology needed for a space laser is not as advanced as they previously had thought.

The CIA has looked for _ but has failed to find _ what officials referred to as ``structural preparations'' for placing such a prototype weapon in space. The Pentagon position represents only the DIA estimate and is not the consensus of the entire American intelligence community, the sources added.

They noted the DIA also has estimated the Soviets might be able to deploy a space-based laser system for defending against ballistic missiles after the turn of the century if technological developments prove successful.

The change in the CIA's assessment was news to military space expert John Pike of the Federation of American Scientists.

In an interview, Pike said he was surprised because just two months ago the Soviets launched their new heavy lift rocket, which has been associated with the space laser weapons platform.

Pike said the change could mean U.S. surveillance satellites have not seen construction in the Soviet Union of a large facility similar to the one being built by TRW Corp. in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., for the initial testing on the ground of an American space laser weapon.

``I assume (the CIA's) assessment is based on what they are not seeing,'' Pike said. ``It sounds like the Soviets are not doing that (building of a space laser test facility) and we are.''

Construction of the TRW facility began several years ago, he said, but it is only in the last six to 12 months that its distinctive features have become apparent so they could be observed by a Soviet spy satellite.

Such a facility, which Pike estimated as costing ``several hundred million dollars,'' is ``very distinctive'' because of the long lines of exhaust pipes

00:21 to carry off the fumes from the laser combustion. He said a picture of the facility appeared in the annual report of the Strategic Defense Initiative office issued in April.

The laser being tested, Pike said, is the so-called Alpha chemical laser that would combust oxygen and hydrogen to form a pencil-thin beam of highly focused light with enough power to destroy satellites and eventually perhaps missiles.

Its development was approved 10 years ago by President Carter's administration, Pike said, and ground testing in the new facility could begin late this year or early next year. Then a ``space-qualified'' test vehicle could be built for actual testing in space as early as 1990 or 1991.

Pike said the advantage of chemical lasers as space weapons is that they require relatively little fuel and power to be carried aloft by rockets.

Chemical lasers and the stationing of lasers in space have been criticized in Congress, particularly by the House Armed Services Committee and its chief technology staffer, Tony Battista.

Battista has lobbied strenuously against the Alpha program because, he said in a telephone interview, the long wavelength beams of chemical lasers can be blocked out easily by readily available shielding materials and coatings.

As an alternative, Battista has pushed to have the chemical laser money diverted to the development of short wavelength lasers with greater penetrating power. ``I couldn't kill Alpha,'' he said. ``I tried to.''

The compromise that was reached funded the development of both the short and long wavelength devices, he said.

Battista also opposes stationing weapons platforms in space because they can be destroyed from the ground with relative ease.

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ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

FROM: | EXTENSION | NO. | DATE

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)	DATE RECEIVED	DATE FORWARDED	OFFICER'S INITIALS	COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)
1. Director of Scientific and Weapons Research		29	G	
2. Deputy Director for Intelligence				
3. ~~Executive Director~~ ER	29 JUL 1987			
4. Deputy Director of Central Intelligence		30 July		
5. Director of Central Intelligence	31 July	6 AUG 1987		
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	SUSPENSE	1200, 31 Jul 87 Date			

Remarks To # 5: For comment to DCI please.

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Executive Secretary
28 Jul 87
Date

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